just might see a ghost tonight

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just might see a ghost tonight

by castelia

Summary

Sid still has a black eye forming, and their fight was only two hours ago, but it feels like it's been centuries, all of a sudden.

It feels like whatever happened tonight to get Effy in this state, whatever happened with Josh, it got through to Tony in a way Sid's words couldn't.

It takes a while for them to move from the bench next to the coffee machine in the desolate hospital hallway. The place feels removed from time, somehow, but maybe it's not the place, maybe it's the fact that it's, as Tony said, four in the morning. Something that makes conversations like this possible.

Tony, apologizing. Tony, explaining himself for once without a subatomic particle metaphor. Sid still has a black eye forming, and their fight was only two hours ago, but it feels like it's been centuries, all of a sudden.

It feels like whatever happened tonight to get Effy in this state, whatever happened with Josh, it got through to Tony in a way Sid's words couldn't.

They go and get that curry, a green one with chicken in a twenty-four hour diner. Not the same one Sid kissed and left Cassie in, hours ago. A different diner. With red wallpaper, a tired waitress and a cheesy pop song on the radio.

As he eats he realizes how hungry he actually was. The hunger only maximizes the deliciousness. Distracted by the fragrant and creamy Thai green chicken curry, it takes a moment to realize he's the only one eating with such vigor.

Tony is staring at his plate, the blue of his eyes dull and lifeless in the artificial lighting of the diner, like the slope of his shoulders.

"You okay?"

He flinches, turns his head a little before facing the plate again. "Yeah."

He shakes his head, seemingly at himself, and starts eating. Once they're done, they get back into the stolen car, and Sid drives.

He takes Tony home with him, because either Tony's house is still empty or his parents left the hospital to get some rest, his parents who wouldn't even hear his side of the story, who really believed that he could possess a single malicious bone towards his little sister. A lot can be said about Tony, but the love he has for Effy has been set in stone and unquestionable for as long as Sid's known him.

So they go home together, and Sid's dad is waiting for them because of course he is, all scowls and *four thirty in the fucking morning* and

stole my fucking car and *did you think I wouldn't notice you sodding idiot?*

At some point during Dad's endless lecture he finally snaps, "The *hospital*!" upon being asked *where the fuck were you that was so fucking important you sodding waste of—*

Which shuts his dad up rather nicely.

"…Are you okay?"

"I'm fine," Sid says, so tired all of a sudden, no fight left in him. "There was a thing with Effy, but she's gonna be okay."

"What happened?" Dad's speaking softly now, wide eyes flashing with guilt and concern.

"Look, I'm just really tired," he says. "It's four thirty in the fucking morning, as you mentioned. I really just want to sleep. Oh yeah, and Tony's staying the night."

At hearing his name, Tony steps out of the hallway and into the light of the living room. He doesn't speak, just stares at Sid and his dad in turn, eyes flickering, before they're trained at the floor instead. He's still wearing the clothes the hospital got him along with the blanket, because for whatever reason when Sid found him he'd been stripped down to only his pants. Holding Effy's dying body tightly like she'd disappear if he didn't, eyes red from crying, *it's all my fault.*

Sid can count the amount of times he's seen Tony cry on one hand.

Tony stares at the floor, dressed in a black t-shirt and grey joggers, mint green blanket draped over his shoulders. He doesn't look like Tony at all, whip-smart and confident, polite while manipulative, the kind of person others revolve around.

"Okay," says Sid's dad, eyes still wide in a way that would be comical under different circumstances, the way he's trying so hard to be gentle and careful. "Okay."

"Can you ring his parents? Let them know?" Sid says. "We're going to sleep now. C'mon, Tone."

Sid moves, and Tony follows, which is such a switch from their usual dynamic that Sid almost has to pause and take a moment at the surreality of it all.

Sid's room is dark, but faintly lit by the lamp on his nightstand. Must've forgotten to turn it off. It does make the room look cozy and safe, so he won't beat himself up about it this time.

"Let's get some sleep, yeah?" Sid murmurs.

Tony looks around the dimly lit room, blinking as though it's too bright. His eyes are unfocused. His movements are sluggish. He'd taken a beating before he came to Sid and recruited his help to find Effy—Sid remembers seeing the bruises in the bright bathroom—but he also remembers seeing new bruises forming in the similar bright light of the hospital before they got Tony new clothes to wear. All over his torso, and one on his neck, too.

Sid has to swallow a lump in his throat. He misses the days when the worst thing Tony got up to was framing Sid for a shaved hamster in class.

Sid thinks about the time he nearly flunked a grade because he wasn't trying hard enough, was staring down the barrel of having to repeat it, and Tony was there with a confident smile and textbooks and weeks of tutoring.

He misses when things were easy.

"Okay," Tony says finally, still so quiet and agreeable.

They're used to sleeping in the same bed, the instances of which can't be counted on two hands anymore, and this night is no different. Though there's no laughter now, none of the hushed conversations they used to have until they either fell asleep or dawn broke.

Despite the entire ordeal, Sid falls asleep easily. He dreams of summer.

He dreams about a meadow, flowers and tall grass everywhere around him. The sun shines brightly, and Sid's smiling. It becomes night. Tony has a sparkler right in front of him. The night sky is filled with stars. He grins brightly.

The sizzling of the sparkler is still in Sid's head when he's suddenly dragged back to wakefulness. It's not even dawn yet. So why…

The realization comes rather quickly. Tony's whole body, next to him, is rigid. He sobs in his sleep, and it's a fucking awful sound Sid never wants to hear ever again. He'll take the Tony who smiled like he did

Sid and Michelle a favor because they weren't bored anymore thanks to Tony's manipulations, he'd rather hear a million snide *shut up, Sids* than hear this.

"I promise," he whimpers. "Please, I promise."

Sid's stomach lurches sickly.

Tony teeters off the edge of the bed, almost toppeling over it, but Sid pulls him back up.

"Whoa," Sid says, steadying, like he's not freaking out inside because *what the fuck happened after Sid left?* "It's okay, you're okay, Tony."

But he trashes in Sid's hold, eyes still shut tightly. "I'll do *anything* but that," he wails. "Please. She needs an ambulance."

Sid's never heard him like that. Pleading. Everything's always come easy to Tony, see, always.

Sid gets on top of him, pinning his hands by the wrists, but this somehow makes the panic even worse.

"I beg you." His eyes are still screwed shut. His chest heaves with sobs. "I beg you, I beg you."

What the *fuck*.

"Tony." Sid speaks as firmly as he can manage. "*Stop*. Effy is okay. You're in my bedroom. It's Sid," he adds belatedly. "It's Sid and I'm going to let you go now, but you need to stop fighting me, okay? Because you're really being a sodding wanker right now."

The tough love act seems to get through to Tony, as he finally opens his eyes, staring up at Sid with confusion.

Slowly, Sid lets go of his wrists, gets off him so they're lying next to each other again.

"I fucked it up." Tony's voice breaks like it did in the hospital when he asked his mum to *just listen for a second.* "He wouldn't come back for me."

"Well, I did come back for you. Skipped out on kissing Cassie for you, even. Appreciate that, twat."

Tony lies still for a long time, his harsh breathing the only sound in

the room.

"…Sid?"

"Yeah," he says, the tension in his body melting away as he slumps against the matress with relief.

"Shit."

"That does sum it up fairly well," he agrees.

Tony rolls to the side to face Sid. "You came back for me."

"Yeah, I did," Sid says simply.

"I'm sorry. For…"

"You already apologized, Tony."

"Oh. Right."

Sid *wants* to ask. He's desperately curious, but…he's also afraid. It could set off another panic attack or whatever that was, for one, and for two… Maybe he really just doesn't want to know. Taking the easy way out, that's what he's doing, but maybe it's for the best.

Tony reaches out and grabs Sid's hand, gentle yet firm.

"Why did you come back for me?" he demands.

He's still shivering, despite the clothes and the blanket from the hospital and Sid's blanket on top of that. But his eyes are no longer unfocused. They hold Sid's gaze, unwavering.

"I—" Sid pauses. "Because…"

Any reasonable person wouldn't have come back, surely. A fight that left their friendship fractured. A nostalgic song on the radio in the diner where he was kissing Cassie before Michelle called. Any reasonable person would have stayed with Cassie and told Michelle to go check on Tony herself if she was so worried.

But Tony is the kind of person others revolve around. Sid's never been an exception; Sid's always been the fucking blueprint. It's always been Tony and Sid, even Michelle said so, *you come as a package,* like it didn't bother her that it placed her on the outskirts.

“Because… Well, because you’re Tony.”

Weak answer though it is, that about sums it up.

“We’re okay,” Tony says, absently, as if to himself. “Effy’s okay.”

His hand is still wrapped around Sid’s.

“Yeah, we’re okay,” he affirms. “And Effy is, too. She’s gonna bounce back from this so quick, you’ll see.”

“Yeah. Yeah, you’re right.”

“Let’s get some sleep, yeah?”

Their hands disentangle.

“Sid. Thank you," whispers Tony in the silence.

“You already thanked me,” he says. “Twice. Thrice, now.”

“I know,” Tony assures. “Just…felt like I should say it again. Thank you for coming back. If you hadn’t… I don’t think…”

“Effy is okay,” Sid reminds him. “It all turned out okay in the end. Hey, what comes after thrice?”

“Nothing,” Tony says, quietly amused. “It’s four times.”

“Quice,” Sid says.

A soft chuckle. “Sure.”

“You were in trouble. Of course I came.”

“I’m going to be better,” Tony says. “I lost sight of what matters. Became distorted, like I said. I won’t let it happen again.”

“That’d be nice,” Sid confesses. “I’ve missed you.”

There’s a quick laugh, but it comes with a sniff. “Christ. Now you’re the one who sounds like Lionel Richie.”

Sid smiles.

They quiet down. Sid's mind settles again, with the soft sound of Tony's breathing, the solid reality of his body next to Sid's.

Sid slides closer and drapes an arm around Tony, pulling him close. Tony lets him, settles against his chest. It's somewhat awkward, not as easy and careless as it used to be before, but that doesn't matter. It's a start.

Sid drifts off, hardly able to believe this is happening, but too tired to question it. He buries his face in Tony's hair and falls asleep.

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